# *OTTOMAN SUZERAINTY OVER MOROCCO DURING ABDULMELIK'S REIGN (1576-1578): A REASSESSMENT*

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Event-oriented history-writing (*histoire événementielle*) is not dead and even quite necessary while working with big and fuzzy concepts (empire, territoriality, centre-periphery relations, *etc*.). This does not imply, however, a revaluation of pre-*Annales* positivism which focuses mainly on decisive acts, actors and moments. We claim that one may have a better understanding of the nature of political power and international relations in the pre-modern period by unearthing new documents that enable the historian to display the machinations of small or middle-term strategies–eventually, their failures–and by deciphering the careers and strategies of minor figures in the margins of Empires.

It is quite common to present Morocco as an Ottoman dependency, at least for the last quarter of the sixteenth century, in Ottoman history manuals and this observation especially holds true for popular history texts in Turkish.[1] If this assumption is not retained in other historiographical traditions, however, this does not seem to be an outcome of a substantiated research.[2] In fact, Ottomano-Moroccan relations is a neglected field–partly due to its detachment from the general frame of the Mediterranean history. Yet, this paper will not be a first attempt since there are already few but well-documented studies with varying focuses.[3] My intention in this short paper is, thus, to pass under review the cogency and relevancy of Early Islamic elements and rhetorics of sovereignty and suzerainty in the interpretation of ambivalent Ottomano-Moroccan relations in the second half of the Sixteenth Century.

## *Saadians and Ottomans: patterns of relationship*

Although patchy information on the earlier phases of Ottomano-Moroccan relations is available, intense interaction between these two Muslim entities dates mostly back to the second half of the Sixteenth Century. This is related to the rise of Saadian dynasty which

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[1] Quite often, this pretension infers an indefinite dependence whose chronological limits are deliberately blurred. *Cf.* the maps in historical atlases: Etienne Copeaux, *Une vision turque du monde à travers les cartes (de 1931 à nos jours)*, Paris, 2000. For some narratives: Yılmaz Öztuna, *Büyük Türkiye Tarihi*, IV/14, İstanbul, 1983, 343-357; Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks*, New York, 1997, 171-174; Ahmet Akgündüz, Said Öztürk, *Ottoman History. Misperceptions and Truth*, Rotterdam, 2011, p. 202. This paper is not about the production of this pre-construction. This requires a multi-layered analysis which concomitantly scrutinizes the elaboration of the myth of protectorate/suzerainty from the 17th century on and the usages as well as the public of this artefact.

[2] M. el-Fasi, "Morocco", *in* : Bethwell Allen Ogot (ed.), *General History of Africa. Vol V: from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century ,* Berkeley, 1999, 204.

[3]Abderrahmane el-Moudden, *Moroccan-Ottoman Relations From the 16th through the 18th Centuries. Contribution to the Study of a Diplomatic Culture*, Princeton University, 1992; *idem*, "The Sharif and the Padishah: Three Letters from Murad III to Abd al-Malik", *Hesperis Tamuda*, vol. 29/ 1 (1991), 113-125; *idem*, "The Idea of the Caliphate between Moroccans and Ottomans: Political and Symbolic Stakes in the 16th and 17th Century-Maghrib", *Studia Islamica*, LXXXIII (1995), 103-112. See also Andrew C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century lbero-African Frontier*, Chicago, 1978.Dairu Yahya, *Morocco in the Sixteenth Century. Problems and Patterns in African Foreign Policy,* Essex, 1981 ; Chantal de la Veronne, "Relations entre le Maroc et la Turquie dans la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle et le début du XVIIe siècle (1554-1616)", *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerrané*, 15/16 (1974), 391-401; Michael Brett, "Morocco and the Ottomans : The Sixteenth Century in North Africa", *Journal of African History*, XXV (1984), pp. 331-341. The only book on this subject in Turkish (*Fas Seferi 1551 - 1578 : Türk Silahlı Kuvvetler Tarihi III ncü Cilt 3 ncü Kısım Eki kitabı,* Ankara 1978) relies largely on Aziz Sami Ilter's (*Şimalî Afrika'da Türkler*, İstanbul, 1936-37, vol. I, pp. 194-95) and Auguste Cour's (*L'établissement des dynasties des Chérifs au Maroc et leur rivalité avec les Turcs de la régence d'Alger 1509-1830*, Paris, 1904, pp. 141-143) accounts. An important source on the subject is Henri de Castries *et al.* (ed.), *Les Sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc,* Paris, 1911-1963 (Abbr. *SIHM*, country name [Espagne, France], volume, pagination).

transformed the initial pattern based on distant mutual recognition between the Ottomans and Wattasids to an antagonistic one. The chief of the Saadians, Muhammed al-Mahdi, after fighting against tribal chiefs and later on his elder brother al-Aruj, gradually increased his power base.[4] With the help of the local tribes, as well as the Jazuli sheikhs, al-Mahdi re-conquered, in 1541, Agadir from the Portuguese. These achievements enabled him to accumulate a symbolical capital and to contest the Wattasid authority.[5] Consequently, the latter sought the support of the Ottomans knowing that the sultan was not indifferent to the rise of the Saadians. In 1547, an Ottoman envoy was sent to Marrakesh to convince al-Mahdi to lift the siege of Fez. In his letter, the Ottoman sultan reserved al-Mahdi only the title of *shaykh al-ʻarab* and asked him to preach and mint money in his name. By this way, Suleyman I denied him any kind of legitimacy. In return, al-Mahdi sent a missive in which the latter was saluted as a mere sultan of fishermen. At the same time, these two new powers of the Maghreb were investing on the rival confraternities–the Moroccans on Djazuliyya and Ottomans on Kadriyya–in order to mobilize for their goals different segments of the frontier region populations[6] The symbolic conflict transformed quickly into a fight for domination over Tlemcen, gate to the sub-Sahara and its riches. Indeed, for the Saadians, blocked to the East by the *beylerbeylik* of Algeria and to the North by the Iberian powers, the only way to expand was to go southwards. In June 1550, Hasan Corso the pasha of Algeria besieged Tlemcen, taken a year before by the Saadians from the Zayyanides–a local dynasty and a year later, he managed to capture Mostaganem, Tlemcen and Peñon de Velez. In 1554, his successor Salih Pasha, although for a brief period, occupied Fez, under the pretext of supporting a Wattasid pretender.[7] Fearing a popular revolt, he had to recede. Al-Mahdi, who managed to escape to Marrakesh, after his reestablishment in Fez started the negotiations with Philip II for an anti-Ottoman alliance which were disrupted by the Moroccan ruler's death in obscure circumstances.[8]

While the Ottoman involvement in the assassination of al-Mahdi is difficult to ascertain, the sheer suspicion complicated the relations even more.[9] Al-Ghalib (1557-1574), did not pursue the aggressive policies of his father, except for the early years of his reign. When in order to deepen his power base he started to kill his dynastic rivals, three of his brothers, Abdulmumin, Abdulmelik, and Ahmed [al-Mansur] (r. 1578-1603) took refuge in Tlemcen under Ottoman control. Nevertheless eager to implement his containment policy elaborated in the middle of the 1550's in North Africa as well, Suleyman I exhorted the governors of Algeria to refrain from meddling in Moroccan political and religious matters. He immediately sent an ambassador to Morocco to enjoin the importance of brotherhood and the need for conciliation and unanimity among Muslims. Al-Ghalib treated the Ottoman embassy with due respect, agreed to negotiate with his brothers in exile and accepted to allocate them money.[10] Official relations between the two political entities were thus established. After his accession to throne, Selim II sent a letter to al-Ghalib in which, as the "warrant of harmony and welfare among the Believers", he assumed the role of mediator between Muslim royal brothers. However, he also urged his ambassadors to negotiate with the prominent men of

[4]Mercedes García-Arenal, "Mahdi, Murabit, Sharif : l'avènement de la dynastie sa'adienne", *Studia Islamica*, LXXI (1990), 77-115.
[5]Chantal de la Veronne, *Histoire sommaire des Saadiens*, Paris, 1997, 17-21.
[6]El-Moudden, "The Idea of the Caliphate",106-107; Francisco Rodriguez-Manas, "Agriculture, Sufism and State in Tenth/Sixteenth century Morocco", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, LIX/3 (1996), 450-471.
[7]*SIHM*, Espagne-2, pp. 128-185.
[8]Chantal de la Veronne, "Politica de Espana, de Marruecos y de los Turcos en los reinos de Fez y Tremecen a mediados del siglo XVI", *Miscelanea de Estudios arabes y hebraicos*, 3 (1954), 87-95.
[9]El-Moudden, *Moroccan-Ottoman Relations,* 69-70.
[10]El-Moudden, *Moroccan-Ottoman Relations,* 73-75.

religion and notables of Fez Marrakesh and Sous so as to implement a revolt against al-Ghalib and enthrone one of the client princes.[11]

*A joint -expedition to Fez (1576)*

Among the three brothers in exile, Abdulmelik was the most active. He participated with the governor of Algeria Uluç Ali to the Ottoman naval campaigns of 1571 directed against the Venetian dominions in the Eastern Mediterranean which ended with the Battle of Lepanto.[12] Although captured by the Spaniards after the battle, he was released by Philip II few months later. In 1572, after the assassination of his elder brother in Tlemcen, Selim II accorded him a privilege grant (*nishan)* confirming him as the legitimate ruler of Fez, Marrakesh and Sous. By this manner, Abdulmelik could have guaranteed an autonomous rule, in case he succeeded (*müyesser oldukda*) in overthrowing his brother and his nephew, successor in law.[13] Withal, Abdulmelik was not only relying to the Sublime Porte in his struggle against al-Ghalib. Documents in *Archivo General de Simancas* reveal that when he was in Madrid in 1572, he contracted an accord with Philip for the latter's support in his struggle, in return he had to inform the Prudent King about Ottoman activities in the Mediterranean.[14] In Algiers, he married the daughter of an important local notable, Haci Murad Reis and kept his relations with Istanbul through his mother who was, seemingly, a friend of Nurbanu sultan's, the wife of Selim II.[15]

In January 1574, al-Ghalib died and his son Muhammad succeeded him. While the new ruler proclaimed himself as an enemy of the Algerian *beylerbeylik*, Abdulmelik participated in the expedition of La Goletta (summer 1574) in which he distinguished himself opportunely.[16] Now a proven military commander and a favourite of Sultan Murad III, he resolved to overthrow his nephew, basing his claims on the *nishan* accorded by Selim II. For the new Ottoman sultan, the offer was irresistible–a few thousand troops and guns from Algeria might have been sufficient to enthrone a client in the strategic Morocco. Backed by Ottoman capital, the Moroccan pretender raised 8,000 soldiers and some twenty field cannons.[17] He departed from Algiers with the governor of Algeria, Ramazan Pasha in the final days of December 1575. Muhammad put up an army of 30,000 soldiers and prepared thirty-six cannons at Fez. The first battle took place at ar-Rukn on 16 March 1576, during which

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[11] Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), *Mühimme Defteri* (*MD*) VII, n° 187. This move was indeed coherent since these two classes were marginalized in the early stages of Saadian rulers because of their resistance to harsh taxation policies: Cour, *L'établissement,* 91-94. But, the popularity of the Ottomans and their Algerian allies, frequent invaders of Morocco, was not better. Interestingly, both al-Ghalib and Selîm II did not react during the Morisco Revolt in Spain (1568-1570) and thus lost popular support, at least, in Maghreb. Gilles Veinstein, "Autour de la lettre de Selim II aux andalous et des origines de la guerre de Chypre", *España y el Oriente islámico entre los siglos XV y XVI. Imperio Otomano, Persia y Asia central*, Encarnación Sanchez, García Pablo Martín Asuero &Michele Bernardini (éd.), Istanbul, Isis, 2007, 271-281.

[12]For Uluc Ali, Emilio Sola, *Uchali*: *El Calabres Tinoso, O El Mito del Corsario Muladi En La Frontera* , Barcelona, 2011.

[13] BOA *MD* XII, n° 1036. It is difficult to interpret the clauses following which Abdülmelik obtained the right to govern Fez, Marrakesh and Sous "in the same manner as his late father and brother" (*müteveffâ babası ve karındaşı mutasarrıf olduğu üzre*). Since his brother al-Ghalib was still reigning and recognized by the Porte, this *nishan* may be interpreted as a document intended for Muhammad al-Mustansir (nephew of Abdülmelik) as well as Algerian governors who should not interfere in any case (*hîç ahad mâni olmayub dahl u taarruz kılmaya)*.

[14] De la Veronne, "Relations entre le Maroc et la Turquie", 393-95.

[15]E. Fagnan, *Extraits inédits rélatifs au Maghreb*, Alger, 1924*,* 396. For Nurbanu see, Benjamin Arbel, Nur Banu (c. 1530-1583): A Venetian Sultana? », *Turcica*, 24 (1992), 241-259.

[16]BOA *MD* XXV, n° 3113.

[17]Numbers relevant to the "Ottoman" soldiers vary from three to five thousand: Fagnan, *Extraits inédits,* 397; *SIHM*, Espagne III, 215-220.

Andalusi fusiliers of the Moroccan ruler defected which made the rest of his army withdraw.[18] As Muhammad fell back, his uncle marched towards Fez where he entered in the last days of March. He reduced the number of his Ottoman mercenaries, both for economic and political reasons, keeping with him only four hundred elite *Rumi* cavalrymen. Muhammad was still resisting following his second defeat in the battle of Khaynuqa'r-rayhan (14th July 1576), after which Abdulmelik seized the Marrakesh fortress. It was only five months later that Muhammed, accepting his defeat, had to flee to Portugal. Soon after, Sous and Taradouant regions' urban elites made their allegiance to the new ruler in late 1576. It was thus not the first battle (with the Ottoman aid) that made Abdulmelik the legitimate ruler, but the later events, especially the conquest of Marrakesh, the main capital of Morocco, and other important regions.[19]

Most of the sources insist on the contractual nature of the military expedition realised by the Moroccan prince and the governor of Algeria: Abdulmelik was to pay back all the expenses upon the success of the operation–which he did, as soon as he entered Fez. On the other hand, Ramazan Pasha was neither willing to stay more in Morocco. He immediately returned back to Algiers, before Abdulmelik's enthronement, leaving however an auxiliary regiment. According to Ottoman historiography, following the battle at ar-Rukn the *hutba* in all over Morocco (*Fas*) was preached in the name of Murad III and golden coins were minted in the latter's name. In other words, Morocco, by this manner, would have become an Ottoman dependency/protectorate. If the Anonymous Moroccan chronicle confirms only the *hutba* element (and only, for Fez[20]), other Moroccan and European sources imply merely that Abdulmelik was enthroned with the Ottoman help without any mention of the *hutba* and *sikke*. The documents in the *MZD* III – two *hükm*s addressed to the beylerbey of Algiers and another one to the *kapudanpasha* Kılıç Ali issued three months after the March expedition– shed some light on the first reactions of the sultan after the "conquest" of the country. In a long text expedited on 30th of June, the sultan congratulates sincerely Ramazan Pasha–who guided Abdulmelik (*önüne düsüb*)–and conquered (*feth*) Morocco (*Fas vilâyetini*) which is as developed as the Egyptian province (*Misr vilâyeti gibi ma'mur*).[21] According to Ramazan Pasha's first reports after Abdulmelik had sat on the place of his father (*babasın yerine oturub*), the *hutba* was called in the name of the Ottoman sultan as well as the coins were minted. Moroccan religious corps and populations (*kâffe-i ulema ve amme-i reaya ü berâya*) were pleased (*mesrûrü'l-hâl*) with the outcome whereas the Iberian powers fell grief-stricken (*gamnâk*). Nevertheless, to accommodate even more the soldiers and the populations to the new political configuration, Murad III was requested to send *istimaletname*s (letters of reconciliation) and honorific robes to the urban elites, important men of religion, *shaykh al-'arab*s as well as to the brother of Abdulmelik, Ahmed (unfortunately, the *Zeyl* do not contain these *istimaletname*s).[22] The governor of Algeria is solicited to be careful about foreign invasion plans and report everything concerning this newly conquered country

[18] Bernard Loupias, "Crónica de la vida y admirables hechos del señor Abdelmelech [Valence?] 1577, oeuvre en prose et en vers, de Fray Bautista", *Hesperis Tamuda,* XXIV/1 (1986), 53-212: 92-97; Fagnan, *Extraits inédits*, 397-401; *SIHM Espagne III*, 221-224.

[19]Loupias, "Crónica de la vida",101-108; *SIHM Espagne III*, 239-245.

[20]Fagnan, *Extraits inédits,* 402.

[21]We do not have the report of Ramazan Pasha and the *Mühimme* document is not very explicit on whereabouts Ramazan was while he addressed his letter to Murad III. But the sultan considers his governor being in Algiers. In fact the chronology of Ramazan Pasha's activities during and just after the ar-Rukn battle is nearly impossible to establish. As a consequence, these questions are left unanswered: After the battle did he deem his mission complete (according to his instructions from the sultan and his contract with the prince) and returned back to Algiers ? Or was he concerned about being to far from turbulent Algiers ? Or did his army refuse to participate any further to the struggle between two Moroccan princes?

[22]Mücteba Ilgürel, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde İstimalet Siyaseti", *in*: *XII. Türk Tarih Kongresi*, Ankara, 1999, vol. III, 941-948.

(*mücededden feth oluna vilayet*) in order that things do not turn out the way they did in the previous conquest (*mukaddema feth olduğu* [*sic!*] *olmamak*). Undoubtedly, Murad III was referring to Salih Pasha's 1554 expedition during which the legitimacy of the expedition was as well based on the motive of "giving relief to a pretender".[23] The sultan, although interested with the news, in the same order, demanded immediate departure of Ramazan Pasha to Tunisia to help the governors of Tunisia and Tripolitania for the conquest of Gafsa fortress.[24]

*Rhetorics and Instruments of Sovereignty in a changing World*

*Mühimme*s are silent for the period between summer 1576 and 1577, but in that period some important changes had taken place. While the new ruler of Morocco continued to revere the sultan, after his rival's exile in Portugal he started to negotiate with European powers, in order to publicise and strengthen his position as an independent ruler.[25] This situation was indeed acknowledged by the Sublime Porte. In the first meetings for a truce between Philip II and Murad III in 1577, Morocco was mentioned among the allies of the Ottoman side just as the Kingdoms of France and Poland as well as the Republic of Venice.[26]In effect, Abdulmelik was active in these negotiations as his father-in-law, Haci Murad in Algeria who was acting as the unofficial representative of Murad III in his dealings with Philip II's emissaries. Although, the initial efforts for an armistice did not yield to any palpable outcome–but the appointment of Hasan Pasha, a supporter of Philip II and Moroccan ruler's plans, to Algerian beylerbeylicate in summer 1577, accelerated presumably the processes–, until Abdulmelik's death during the Battle of Three Kings (4 August1578), Escorial and Topkapı, had acknowledged respectively their former client as an independent ruler.[27]

We do not have access to the *hutba*s of the 1570's and the claims about the *hutba* in the name of a sultan in any country beyond the Ottoman realm are subject to caution. And the coins minted for Murad III in Fez ? The numismatic catalogues[28] do not provide us with further information, but there are examples of Abdulmelik's coins as an independent ruler.[29] Shall we qualify, therefore, the accuracy of the account of Ramazan Pasha, as well as the Ottoman suzerainty over Morocco altogether as baseless? Or else, perhaps the problem is to be formulated in another manner since there are some inconclusive references to *hutba* pronounced in the name of Murad III in Fez in 1576. In other words how can we interpret the

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[23] *MZD* III, n° 536. *Cf. Osman Karataş, 3 Numaralı Mühimme Zeyli Rebiülevvel-Cemaziyelevvel 984/ Haziran-Ağustos 1576 (s. 176-351),* [Marmara Üniversitesi Yeniçağ Tarihi Bilim Dalı M. A. Thesis], *Istanbul, 2010,* 39-40. In a following order (n° 537), again addressed to the *Cezâyir-i garb beylerbeyisi*, the sultan confirms the idea of the execution of Muhammed's chief advisers who are suspect of collaborating with the King of Portugal. The third document in this register relevant to this study helps us to understand the modalities of the event's reception: The news about the joint-expedition arrives Istanbul *via kapudanpasha* Ali who received the couriers of Abdulmelik and Ramazan Pasha on the 8th of June while he has sailing nearby Morea. Murad III sends him the day he receives the news, the 10th of June, a *hükm* (n° 565) in which the *sikke* and *hutbe* issues as well as many other details are same as in the more detailed document sent afterwards to Ramazan Pasha.

[24] On the political context in Tunisia just after the expedition of La Goletta (1574): Charles Monchicourt, "Les Hafsides en exil de 1574 à 1581", *Revue tunisienne*, XXVI (1936), 187-221.

[25] Yahya, *Morocco n the Sixteenth Century*, 72-75.

[26] Susan Skilliter, "The Hispano-ottoman armistice of 1581", in: C. E. Bosworth (ed), *Iran and Islam,* Edinburgh, 1971, 491-516: 499. Another evidence is a marginal note to the copy of a letter to Abdulmelik dated 30th of May 1577, put in a red satin bag and sealed with silver, just the same as the letters addressed to the kings of France and Poland. Published in el-Mouedden, "The Sharif and the Padishah", 118.

[27] *SIHM Espagne III*, pp. 327-335. Ramazan Pasha's remplacement by Hasan the Venetian the same year can be explained on the one hand for his refusal of peace with Spain (*ibid.*) and on the other, his spiteful conduct towards the new Moroccan ruler as well to the latter's subjects: MD XXX, n° 424-430. Antonio Fabris, " Hasan 'Il Veneziano' tra Algeri e Costantinopoli*", in*: *Veneziani in Levante. Musulmani a Venezia*, *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, suppl. 15 (1997), 51-66.

[28] Atom Damalı, *History of Ottoman Coins. Vol. III. Sultan Selim II, Sultan Murad III*, Ankara, 2011.

[29] Stanley Lane Poole, *Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the British Museum*, *Vol. V*: *The Coins of the Moors of Africa and Spain: and Kings and Imams of the Yemen in the British Museum*, London, 1880, 87.

joint-expedition of the Moroccan prince Abdulmelik, Ramazan Pasha of Algeria backed by Murad III and the subsequent events?

In a letter–only a copy of its translation in Spanish is extant–addressed to the *kaid* of Tetouan three days after the Battle of ar-Rukn, Abdulmelik presented himself as the "servant of Grand Seigneur Suleyman (*sic*!) and the king of Fez, Marrakesh, Sous and Taroudant". In his later correspondence, the first attribute disappeared and the second part of this phrase with some lavish addenda became his official *intitulatio*.[30] In fact, this can be correlated with the *hutba* matter. In as much as Abdulmelik strengthened his hold in Morocco independently from Ottoman-Algerian assistance and secured internal legitimacy, reference to the Ottomans became futile. Mehmed b. Mehmed, who gave one of the earliest and most detailed accounts of Fez expedition in the Ottoman *tevarih* literature presented Abdulmelik "as the independent sultan of the utmost Maghreb (*istiklâl ile sultân-ı garb-ı aksâ*)".[31]However, his narrative does not reveal either the different episodes and stakes of Abdulmelik's rule in the context of a Hapsburg-Ottoman détente in the Western part of the Mediterranean in the last quarter of the sixteenth century which transformed the earlier patterns of power relations in the region. In what we can qualify as "post-medieval Mediterranean", where the concepts and reality of territoriality were subject to a transformation and precedent quasi-decisive attributes of sovereignty and suzerainty, *i.e. hutba* and *sikke*, or rhetorics of conquest have become rather instrumentalised artefacts of internal and international policy-making.

[30]*SIHM, France I*, 347 and *sq*

[31]Abdurrahman Sağırlı, *Mehmed b. Mehmed er-Rûmî (Edirneli)'nin Nühbet et-Tevarih ve'l-Ahbar'ı ve Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân'ı*, [İstanbul Üniversitesi unpublished ph.d. thesis], Istanbul, 2000, 348.